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The Career Path of a Correctional Treatment Specialist / Community Reentry

Case Manager

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Master of Science in Criminology & Criminal Justice

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May 2021

The Career Path of a Correctional Treatment Specialist / Community Reentry**Case Manager**

Incarcerated individuals who have been in the correctional system for long periods of time face an extremely difficult and complex process when it comes to successfully rehabilitating and reintegrating into society. Correctional treatment specialists, often referred to as community reentry case managers, work to ease this process for men and women leaving incarceration. The person employed in this role is known for being the main connection between the correctional system and social service agencies for parolees/probationers (HumanServicesEDU, 2021). This position serves to provide assistance and emotional support in making healthy, sustainable decisions in regards to housing, employment, counseling services, education, transportation, and other discharge plans. The primary goal of this position is to prevent recidivism, which is known as the tendency of a formerly incarcerated individual to reoffend when returning to the community. Because this is the major focus of a correctional treatment specialist, the evaluation of career success, challenges, and potential solutions is crucial to ensure public safety and improve our criminal justice system.

Although this job is similar to a parole/probation officer, the correctional treatment specialist focuses on advising clients, developing personal rehabilitation/treatment plans with them, and directly referring them to social services (CorrectionalOfficerEDU, 2021).

Correctional treatment specialists work with inmates, probation officers, and other agencies to develop parole/release plans, write case reports that discuss the inmate's history and likelihood of recidivism, and plan education/training programs to improve offenders' job skills (CompareTopSchools, 2021). This position also consists of providing correctional clients with proper coping skills, anger management, and drug/sexual abuse counseling, either individually or

in groups. Because there is a large amount of client interaction and high caseloads, some specialists primarily work with specific types of crimes or cases. For example, a specialist could solely manage domestic violence cases or juvenile parolees/probationers (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). In contrast, probation/parole officers work alongside correctional treatment specialists to ensure that the plans are being followed and that the offender complies with court-orders (Correctional Officer EDU, 2021).

While “correctional treatment specialists” and “reentry case manager” are often interchangeable position titles, they do differ slightly in the employment environment and by who they become employed. Correctional treatment specialists are mostly employed by the government, working directly in local, state, and federal correctional facilities. They also work in jails, community corrections, and parole/probation offices where they evaluate the progress of inmates through questionnaires, psychological tests, and case reports on their status. Correctional treatment specialists working in parole and probation agencies “perform many of the same duties as their counterparts who work in correctional institutions” (CompareTopSchools, 2021).

Community reentry case manager positions, on the other hand, are more often listed by private, nonprofit organizations, group residential facilities, or social service agencies that passionately work to support formerly incarcerated men and women. For example, a nonprofit organization called Community Resources For Justice (CRJ) is not a prison, but is looking for a case manager to assist with reintegrating their formerly incarcerated residents into society. Further, other industries with the highest level of employment for correctional treatment specialists are individual and family services, facilities support services, and vocational rehabilitation services (CorrectionalOfficerEDU, 2021).

Hiring Process

To hire employees, the organization or agency looking for a Correctional Treatment Specialist or Community Reentry Case Manager post their job opening and description. State and federal positions can often be found on commonly used job search engines just as positions for nonprofit organizations are. In addition, state and federal job openings can be found on USAJobs.gov/Mass.gov. Probation offices or community organizations/agencies post job openings on their own websites, so correctional treatment specialists applicants can also find career listings this way, whereas state and federal institutions don't have the same type of privately owned websites.

Overall, an applicant must be at least 21 years old, have a valid driver's license, pass a drug test, pass a background check, and must not have any felony convictions. After the job search and application process is completed, an oral interview is the next step in becoming a correctional treatment specialist. Once the interview phase is passed, the applicant will likely be asked to complete combinations of written, psychological, and polygraph exams (Criminal Justice Degree Schools, 2020). The primary purpose of testing their mental and emotional well being is to ensure they are able to successfully handle working in this demanding position where people actively rely on and learn from them.

Educational Requirements

There are educational requirements for this career, but they are not extensive and they often vary by state. A bachelor's degree in criminal justice is usually required to become a correctional treatment specialist (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Commonly, a bachelor's degree in related fields, such as social work, human services, or behavioral sciences, are also accepted to become a correctional treatment specialist (Alvernia, 2021). While not mandatory, it

is also common to see job listings mention that they prefer applicants to have one year experience in case management and/or working in correctional/residential settings.

Necessary Skills To Qualify

There are various distinct skills that an employee can possess to efficiently aid those who are formerly incarcerated. Firstly, the ability to think critically is crucial because they need to assess an individual and develop personalized plans with the best resources possible (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). This position requires you to actively and accurately analyze someone's needs, evaluate specific information at hand, and use skillful observation, as well as proper reasoning, when using belief to guide further action. All of these factors make up critical thinking skills and will need to be actively practiced on a daily basis in this type of career.

Communication and relationship building skills are also extremely important to have as a correctional treatment specialist (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Employees in this position frequently work together with parole officers and agency staff, so the ability to collaborate with professionals in the community is crucial. Specialists have to effectively interact with not only their parolees/probationers, but also family members, friends or significant others, lawyers, judges, treatment providers, and law enforcement officers. Especially because this position requires you to be the primary connection between the formerly incarcerated individual and the relevant social service agency, knowing how to properly advocate for your client and discuss various aspects in regards to their personal program plan is necessary. Correctional treatment specialists must be able to gain trust and withhold judgment in building relationships and achieving successful community re-entry (Jones & Bartlett, 2013).

Through critically analyzing each case and properly communicating with various individuals, community reentry case managers need to have precise, reliable decision making

skills. As there could be various routes to take when considering a rehabilitation plan, specialists need to decide which needs to prioritize, as well as which services best meet those needs. Being able to decide on what are considered to be strengths and weaknesses of a client, as well as costs and benefits of their rehabilitation plan is crucial in this role (Truity, 2020). When guiding another individual, having a wide perspective for all aspects of the client and the community ensures that the most effective decisions are made.

Emotional stability is an important quality that correctional treatment specialists absolutely need to possess. In this career, specialists often have to “cope with hostile individuals or otherwise upsetting circumstances on the job” (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Formerly incarcerated clients may have mental, physical, or emotional challenges that they look to specialists for stability and guidance in overcoming. Serving as a role model in all of these aspects is crucial for specialists on a daily basis. The family and friends of clients may also be difficult to work with at times. Also, the clientele in this career are people who have committed crimes, some being more serious than others. The ability to move past the perception and emotion that can come along with knowing your clients hurt others is mandatory in this position (Career Herd, 2021). The genuine desire to rehabilitate and positive regard for others’ potential is essential to be effective in this role.

Lastly, correctional treatment specialists need to have high levels of organizational skills. This position requires you to manage multiple cases at the same time, giving necessary attention and proper assistance to each one. Time management comes along with organization in these aspects as well, because failing to keep track of your work and complete your responsibilities will prevent success in this specific job. Specialists can expect to manage anywhere from 20 to

over 100 active cases; the agency's needs and the offender's level of risk determine the number of cases a specialist handles (Criminal Justice Profiles, 2020).

Further, high risk offenders usually require more time and resources than a low risk offender. Organization skills are crucial in any position, but the clientele in this career rely on the ability of their case manager to be on top of their duties, because their wellbeing heavily depends on it. Additional skills that are beneficial to possess, in order to succeed in this role, are active listening, social perceptiveness, cultural competence, respect for diversity, empathy, compassion, problem sensitivity, written and verbal communication, and speech clarity (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021). In general, it is also extremely crucial to note the importance of correctional treatment specialists being able to maintain appropriate boundaries with their clients. As it can be difficult to work with the correctional population and close relationships inevitably form, community reentry case managers must keep the relationship strictly professional at all times. Boundaries can be crossed in various ways when it comes to personal, romantic, emotional, social, physical, and ethical aspects of the correctional treatment specialist/correctional client relationship. Examples of crossing boundaries would be disclosing personal information about themselves or the client, exchanging gifts with one another, or meeting the client at a restaurant for social/romantic reasons (Cooke, Hall, Friedman, Jain, and Wagoner, 2019).

Career Prospects

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020), the median annual wage for correctional treatment specialists was \$54,300 as of May 2019. The highest pay in these positions is found in local government, followed by state government and social assistance, respectively. The community reentry case manager positions for organizations, like nonprofits and community-based agencies, typically have salaries closer to the \$40,000 range. Correctional

treatment specialists are employed by state governments, so they typically enjoy full benefit plans including health insurance (CareerHerd, 2021). Other benefits, mostly at nonprofits like CRJ specifically, include dental and life insurance, paid holidays, vacation and sick time, tuition assistance, 401k, vision plans, and employee referral bonuses (Community Resources For Justice, 2021). In regards to opportunities for promotion and advancement within this career, moving up to a “supervisory position is primarily based on experience and performance” (Truity, 2020). Those with the desire often go on to obtain Master’s or Doctoral degrees in criminology, psychology, or law (CorrectionalOfficerEDU, 2021), which can sometimes be required to achieve further career advancement.

The work environment in this career can be stressful, frequently changing, active, and unique. Correctional treatment specialists may have court deadlines imposed by the statute of limitations and, as previously discussed, various in depth cases to manage. This creates an undoubtedly stressful work environment, as the qualities discussed above prove that organization, time management, and emotional stability can help manage this stress. At times, the work environment can be unpredictable because many officers travel to perform home and employment checks or property searches. Because of the hostile environments they may encounter, some may carry a firearm or pepper spray for protection (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020).

Despite the high stress levels which make the job difficult at times, this work can be extremely rewarding. Many specialists receive personal satisfaction from counseling members of their community and helping them become productive citizens (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). This career allows employees to experience long term growth in their clients whom they have built close relationships with. Working in this role definitely requires a special type of

person who believes in motivating others to their fullest potential and often requires an immense amount of uplifting, positive conversations. At the end of the day, the employees working together all have the same goal of rehabilitating an individual and bettering not only their future, but public safety and society overall. The general intent behind wanting this career is to reduce crime. General benefits of this career include that it has a predictable schedule, requires no more than a bachelor's degree, and provides paid training opportunities (CareerHerd, 2021).

Future Job Prospects

Large caseloads and high levels of stress come along with this job, so oftentimes job openings arise from people leaving the position each year (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). This means that job opportunities are typically plentiful and reoccurring in this position, as new qualified applicants can be needed often. Openings for community reentry case manager positions are more unique and rare to find than for correctional treatment specialist jobs in facilities. In general, jobs for correctional treatment specialists are expected to grow 4 percent until 2029, which is as fast as the average for all occupations (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Community corrections is viewed as an economically viable alternative to incarceration and is frequently reoccurring due to the fact that the majority of inmates return to society at one point. This indicates that the demand for correctional treatment specialists should continue and be reliable for job hunting in the future (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). In 2019, 96 percent of total employment in this occupation was by the government (split between local and state), and 4 percent was seen in healthcare and within social assistance programs (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020).

Certification and Training

There is no universal, professional certification required to become a correctional treatment specialist. But, there is a certification that can enhance your expertise when applying for a position. Further, correctional treatment specialists can become Certified Rehabilitation Counselors (CRC) through the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC) (CorrectionalOfficerEDU, 2021). To qualify for this certification, the individual must have a Master's degree in counseling, rehabilitation counseling, or a related field, so not all specialists are CRC certified.

Oftentimes, training for correctional treatment specialists is provided, and sometimes required, by the organization after hire. Correctional case managers generally complete training managed by the state or the federal government, depending on the organization of the employer (Criminal Justice Degree Schools, 2020). An employee's background is analyzed to see if they should go through a probationary period and training for enhancement of their skills and abilities. This can be extremely helpful when ensuring that all employees within the agency or organization have the proper foundational knowledge, priorities, and necessary qualifications to begin their career. After this training, a certification test may be required, depending on the employer, to assess the skills learned (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020).

Policy Issues and Challenges Faced by Correctional Treatment Specialists

Career Burnout

Job burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism, most often occurring among individuals who do people work of some sort (Lindquist & Whitehead, 1986). Unlike small doses of occupational stress that can be healthy, burnout occurs when the stress from the

job becomes overbearing and dangerous in how it affects the individual experiencing it. Research conducted by Carlson and Thomas (2006) compared burnout between prison caseworkers and correctional officers at two Midwestern prisons to examine the reasons for high job turnover. This study concluded that there was a significantly higher level of burnout in caseworkers when compared to correctional officers (Carlson & Thomas, 2006). There are many explanations as to why correctional treatment specialists face career burnout, such as emotional drainage, lack of administrative support, and heavy caseload responsibility.

As mentioned earlier, emotional stability is a necessary quality to have in this career because correctional treatment specialists often deal with difficult circumstances and clients. This skill is often put to the test for case managers, as job burnout often occurs due to emotional exhaustion. A large stressor causing this emotional drainage is the greater, unique complexity of client needs (CareerExcellence, 2018). The clients that case managers work with every day face significant mental, emotional, and physical challenges and need guidance. This plays a significant role in career burnout. There are studies that specifically examine the emotional tolls that correctional treatment staff face, to ultimately analyze career burnout as a whole. Lambert, Barton-Bellessa, and Hogan (2015) provide a review of current literature and research on this concept. Overall, prior research concludes that “burnout, especially the emotional exhaustion dimension, can have significant negative consequences for both correctional staff and facilities” (Lambert et al., 2015, p. 3) This study then went beyond analyzing the effects of emotional burnout within the staff and organization. Further, it examined the effects of emotional exhaustion on life satisfaction, support for treatment, support for punishment, absenteeism, views on sick leave, and turnover intent for correctional staff at a private facility for juvenile offenders.

The level of life satisfaction one experiences is crucial to analyze because life satisfaction is associated with better emotional, mental, and physical health. Research has found that people who are happy with life often have a positive regard for others, are more willing to interact, are more productive, and are less likely to quit their jobs (Duckworth, Quinn, & Seligman, 2009; Erdogan, Bauer, Truxillo, & Mansfield, 2012). Unfortunately, correctional treatment specialists often experience the opposite of these because their work causes a decrease in life satisfaction. Results of Lambert and colleagues' (2015) study on correctional staff firstly determined that "emotional burnout had significant negative associations with life satisfaction" (Lambert et al., 2015, p. 1). Spending most hours and days of your life in a negative state at a job that often brings emotional exhaustion inevitably hinders positive life factors external from employment and disrupts one's level of happiness.

For example, family relationships, home life, and mental health can be negatively affected by the emotional burnout this career brings. While there is minimal research done on correctional staff work-life conflict, the few studies do show that their specific workplace environment poorly impacts their work-family balance. Further, correctional officers have been observed to experience higher levels of work-family conflict than non-custody staff (Lambert & Hogan, 2006), and work-on-family conflicts are positively related to higher levels of depression (Obidoa, Reeves, Warren, Reisine, & Cherniack, 2011). This is true for correctional staff because they encounter two popular causes for work-family conflict, being time-conflicts and strain-conflicts, while on the job.

Time-based conflicts occur when work's time demands or scheduling interferes with or causes conflict with the home life of a person (Lambert, Minor, Wells, & Hogan, 2014). This is common in correctional organizations/facilities because they have higher caseloads than

employees can handle, a lack of administrative support/role conflict, and require staffing every day of the year while facing a high employee turnover. As a result, more time that theoretically should be allocated to home life is forcibly put into work life in order to keep up with the realities of the job. As patterns of work-family conflict become common, the family's view on this job becomes negative. The perceived dangerousness of the job and the perceived psychological demands of the job are proven to enhance work-life conflict (Lambert et al., 2014). Strain-based conflicts are more likely to occur in correctional institutions than in other organizations because staff must deal with unwilling clients who can be manipulative or difficult to handle. For example, a correctional staff member who has dealt with an uncooperative and verbally abusive inmate may take their frustration and anger out on their family/friends at home (Lambert et al., 2014). Lashing out over work stressors can severely hurt the relationships the employee has with their significant other, children, friends, parents, etc. Even further, this built up frustration and anger from the job can lead to unexpected forms of domestic violence at home when verbal, physical, or mental abuse are used to suppress the career burnout and emotional exhaustion.

Unfortunately, career burnout and emotional exhaustion can also significantly affect the views and feelings one had when they initially entered this position. It can lead to employees developing unfavorable feelings towards correctional clients and reducing support of clients due to stress-built frustration. This results in correctional treatment specialists having negative views on supporting client treatment and positive relationships to their punishment (Lambert et al., 2015). Moreover, Lambert and colleagues (2015) also discovered positive associations with absenteeism and intent to leave the position among correctional staff. In the same way that emotional burnout can cause correctional staff to have negative thoughts about their clients, it

can also result in employees disliking the correctional organization and having the desire to leave the position (Lambert et al., 2015). In altering one's mental state, emotional constraints also cause employees to fight for more time off and to partake in unusual behavior, like not showing up to work. This makes sense, as various other research studies found that long-term exposure to emotional burnout can lead to health problems (Lin, 2013; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Neveu, 2007), supporting the finding of fighting about sick time and frequent absenteeism. Correctional treatment specialists often need support from their organization for, not only the emotional, but the psychological and physical, strains faced on a daily basis.

A lack of support from the organization's management is another significant factor that plays into the career burnout for correctional treatment specialists. Garland (2004) conducted research that supports this, through a survey aimed to measure burnout among correctional treatment specialists. The findings of this study reported that correctional treatment staff who did not have administrative support felt far more exhausted than those who did not, as cause for burnout in more than half of respondents was job assignments and function (Micieli, 2008). This research suggests that the organizational and administrative culture can negatively affect the correctional treatment specialist when not enough support, recognition, or stress relief is provided.

These aspects heavily impact career burnout, as a lack of assistance from the administration becomes significantly draining to an employee working in such a high stress, unique environment. Successful case management requires clear lines of communication and cooperation between probation/parole officers, treatment staff, and management. When this fails to properly occur within the program's administration, case managers face an increase in paperwork, lack of control over cases, and poor supervision of client progress (Healey, 1999).

These aspects can not only cause burnout, but also recidivism, another career challenge that will later be discussed.

Not only do correctional treatment specialists face job burnout due to challenges within their program's administration, it also stems from the burden of having too heavy of a caseload. This was briefly mentioned earlier, as a report from the U.S. Department of Justice stated that reentry programs struggle to find success due to "poorly designed programs and overburdened case managers" (Healey, 1999, p. 2). The size of caseload varies amongst organization and jurisdiction of employment, case managers are expected to be responsible for anywhere from 20 to even 100 active cases at a time. Moreover, caseloads can be double or triple the size of what one person can handle and resources in the community are able to assist.

As a result, the immense caseload builds up, and case managers become unable to help all of their clients. This causes them to stress over knowing that too many of their clients are underserved, at risk of struggling in society, and could possibly reoffend without proper assistance. Frequently having to manage these stressful factors within a large number of clients can cause the correctional treatment specialist to overwork themselves physically, mentally, and emotionally, inevitably causing career burnout. Case managers are put in a challenging situation because they have the responsibility of helping all of their cases and genuinely see value in assisting each individual, but realistically only have the ability to help some.

Lack of Funding and Resources

Nationwide, about 80 percent of released prisoners are subject to a period of supervision in the community, with a significant increase in the number of prisoners reentering communities compared to the 1980s (Baer, Bhati, Brooks, Castro, ...Witterfield, 2006). Unfortunately, resources have not been able to keep up with such a fast paced increase, serving as a substantial

challenge that community reentry case managers have to overcome, and correctional clients have to suffer from. Jennifer Cobbina, PhD, an associate professor in the School of Criminal Justice at Michigan State University, explains that “many people are released without services that promote successful reentry because there simply is not enough money to help everyone who needs services” (Reardon, 2018, para. 21). Oftentimes, funds are prioritized toward people who are at the highest risk of reoffending, although lower-risk individuals would also benefit from services (Reardon, 2018) and still face reentry challenges that put them at risk of recidivism.

Financial support can allow the reentry projects that have demonstrated successful plans to expand into more programs (Burden, 2019). When there’s a lack of funding, there becomes a lack of program reliability and availability for the correctional clients, which prevents the case managers from providing a successful reentry process. The case managers’ work can only extend as far as their financial support allows, so their opportunities to create, implement, and continue successful reentry plans for current and future correctional clients become limited.

DeMichele and Payne (2007) conducted a study to gather data on community corrections practices. For example, one participant stated that as caseloads in the agency have doubled, their “ability to meet the needs of these offenders has been difficult with limited community resources, limited budgets, and a lack of support from the top and the bench” (DeMichele & Payne, 2007, p. 6) A case manager’s ability to do their job sufficiently can only extend so far when successful reentry is so heavily reliant on community resources. If there are not enough resources to provide clients with, the problem of heavy caseload only gets worse, increasing the stress and obstacles faced on the job. This example of job frustration from DeMichele and Payne’s study (2007) not only supports some of the previously discussed factors that lead to the challenge of career

burnout, but it also demonstrates how the challenge of limited funding, budgets, and resources can seriously hinder case management.

Not having enough community resources and financial support when helping clients is a difficult factor for case managers to deal with because the success of their job relies on these aspects, but it's out of control. Further, "funding issues are tied to most decisions made by organizations" who expect their employees to manage an increase of offenders without an increase in resources (DeMichele and Payne, 2007). Such an unrealistic expectation and immense lack of funding within the organizations can put emotional tolls on employees; the help they are able to give is uncontrollably limited and they have to work through this difficult reality with their clients who need these resources. Community reentry specialists can feel significant defeat, hopelessness, frustration, and emotional lows when the level of accessible assistance does not compare to the amount of work needed to be done or people needing to be helped.

Overcoming Recidivism

The other two major career challenges that this paper discusses above, job burnout and a lack of resources, inevitably point to the bigger policy issue of recidivism because they impact the ability to achieve effective case management, thereby increasing risk of recidivism among formerly incarcerated individuals. Case managers are known for being the key to preventing recidivism, because the outcomes of their work affect the safety of individuals and communities. This can be a lot of pressure to undergo within a career, as the primary goals of correctional treatment specialists are to effectively reintegrate an individual into society and overcome the challenges of reoffending. A major policy issue within this career is that it can, and oftentimes does, lead to recidivism when job responsibilities are not properly executed or met. It is crucial to note that while there is a significant amount of responsibility within this career, correctional

treatment specialists do not have complete control in overcoming recidivism. Further, there is also a level of responsibility within the correctional client to refrain from reoffending. The individuals must have a genuine desire, motivation, and commitment to successfully rehabilitating themselves. Correctional treatment specialists must understand that their clients are accountable for making positive choices in life and using the assistance they are provided towards a safe, healthy, functional reentrance to society.

Research illustrates that “recidivism rates are high among recently released offenders, as 85 percent commit new crimes within the first 3 years of release” (Burden, 2019, p. 3-4). Formerly incarcerated individuals are unique clients because while they are free from prison, they struggle with adapting to a new life without offending and battling the societal stigma against being formerly incarcerated. For them, being exposed to a new way of life is overwhelmingly difficult, as their time in prison has compromised their knowledge and skills while being isolated from reality. Many clients are at the typical age of retirement, but instead have to establish themselves in a community to rebuild their lives. This is intimidating to clients and creates numerous barriers to overcome, increasing the temptation of reoffending.

There are various reasons why correctional clients risk recidivism, but a primary factor is inefficient case management. Research suggests that successful reentry depends on the degree to which “former prisoners’ multiple needs-including housing, drug treatment, mental health services, employment training, job opportunities, and family counseling-are addressed” (Lindquist, Willison, Rossman, Walters, & Lattimore, 2015, p. 3) If the case managers are not able to properly meet each of these needs in a sufficient way, nor are they successfully partaking in post-custody supervision, the correctional clients do not have the support they need to be functional members of society. Moreover, correctional clients often reoffend due to insufficient

resources, assistance, and/or oversight from their case managers. Successful reentry is so heavily dependent on a case manager's ability to address these various areas because failing to do so can result in homelessness, unemployment, and poverty, which are all factors that have been shown to contribute to one's decision to commit crime.

Research has found that, collectively, between 4.7 and 11.4 percent of individuals exiting prison become homeless in the first two years (Metraux & Culhane, 2004; Remster, 2013). Even further, 60.5 percent of individuals exiting prison had more than one distinct spell of homelessness during an eight year release period (Remster, 2019). Not only does homelessness occur more than it should in the first two years of post-release, but it even more commonly arises years later. This reflects gaps in case management follow up, as clients are often left unsupervised as time goes on. Other aspects of community reentry, such as securing employment and gaining access to medical care, often depend on stable housing (Remster, 2021). Without housing, individuals cannot find a job to support themselves or healthcare to maintain stability, making the act of committing crime the most attractive way of surviving.

Furthermore, between 60 and 75 percent of formerly incarcerated individuals remain unemployed one year after their release (Center for American Progress, 2021). Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the unemployment rate of formerly incarcerated individuals in the U.S. was 27 percent, which is “nearly five times higher than the unemployment rate of the general public and eclipsing the highest level of general unemployment ever recorded in the country during the Great Depression” (Center for American Progress, 2021). As COVID-19 has immensely inhibited employment for the general public, formerly incarcerated individuals now face an even greater challenge by having to figure out a job search during a global pandemic, to which they have no exposure in the first place due to being isolated in prison.

While homelessness and unemployment can obviously lead to poverty, poverty rates amongst people who are formerly incarcerated are more difficult to report compared to homelessness and unemployment. But, research does show that mass incarceration has significantly increased poverty, and that the official poverty rate would have fallen considerably between 1980 and 2004 had it not been for mass incarceration (DeFina & Hannon, 2009). Also, people who enter the criminal justice system are overwhelmingly poor to begin with, as “two-thirds of individuals detained in jails report annual incomes under \$12,000 prior to arrest” (Center for Community Change, n.d.). Further, incarceration contributes to poverty because it creates employment barriers, decreases economic opportunity and security, creates criminal debt and fees/fines, and cuts off access to public benefits that help prevent poverty. Facing these challenges while incarcerated makes it more likely that these individuals will be living in poverty when they leave. In turn, the post-release transition is more difficult and the opportunity to commit crime becomes a necessity to survive.

In overcoming recidivism and preventing these challenges, it is imperative that the case management process includes a strong community handoff component, particularly at the moment of release, and a continuation of care between in-jail and community-based programs/services (Warwick, Dodd, & Neusteter, 2012). Continuation of care is crucial for these clients, as homelessness, poverty, unemployment, etc. have been shown to occur years after release. While this is the ideal process and theoretical goal for every client, the various barriers that correctional case managers encounter inhibit the likelihood that community handoff is strong and that post-release care is sufficiently provided. Unfortunately, when the stress of this frustration becomes too much to handle, job burnout worsens and overcoming recidivism becomes that much more difficult.

Potential Solutions to Challenges Faced by Correctional Treatment Specialists

Legal Action to Fund Correctional Educational and Employer Incentives

Inmates are commonly released from prison with little education. Lacking sufficient education results in the inability to find employment, and the ability to qualify for it, being significantly more difficult for formerly incarcerated individuals and their reentry case managers. Because employers look for specific levels of education that correctional clients simply do not have, the work of a correctional treatment specialist and the motivation of the correctional client face a block during the reentry and hiring process. When challenges in obtaining a job are faced during post-release reentry, the formerly incarcerated client is at risk of living in homelessness and poverty, which the case manager then has to handle as an employee.

As previously discussed, successfully reintegrating back into the community without reoffending is unlikely when an individual does not have proper housing, income, food, or healthcare. The prevention of recidivism depends on finding a sustainable job that can support a healthy, safe, stable, happy way of living. To ensure this, legislation that require Pell Grants for inmates and support financial assistance towards correctional higher education degree programs are needed. Funded assistance for correctional education can provide formerly incarcerated individuals with the knowledge, experiences, and qualifications needed to obtain sufficient employment post-release, and ultimately prevent recidivism.

The Second Chance Act (SCA) of 2007: Community Safety Through Recidivism

Prevention is an example of legal action that was taken to address the lack of support for reentry programming and prevent the risk of recidivism. This act was signed into law in 2008 with the goal of increasing reentry programming for individuals released from state prisons and local jails (Lindquist et al., 2015). The act lays out specific areas that the SCA grants must address when

allocating resources and services for correctional clients. Some examples of these target areas are healthcare, housing, child services, education, substance abuse and mental health treatment, victim services, and employment services.

As education is a minor aspect of the SCA, there needs to be more legal action in support of expanding Pell Grants specifically because recidivism can be prevented through higher education degree programs, resources, and opportunities. Taking legal action to specifically expand Pell Grants that fund the cost of correctional degree programs will allow individuals who are incarcerated to actually have an opportunity to not only work towards a goal, but better themselves intellectually, professionally, mentally, and socially. For example, inmates could be actively working towards their Associate's degree while incarcerated to, not only build their preparation for the reentry process, but to take on a journey that leads to self-enhancement and motivates the desire to obtain other degrees.

Having legal and financial support for these programs can prevent recidivism because, in today's society, higher education degrees are often required to qualify for a job and have been shown to enhance not only employment opportunities, but the probability of attainment as well (Vista College, 2019). Moreover, a lack of education is a major barrier that correctional treatment specialists need to overcome on a daily basis because many facilities don't offer a program to help this issue. Luckily, at both the federal level and in most state prison systems, participation in some form of GED education is mandatory (TheBestSchools, 2019).

But, this level of education is oftentimes not enough, and correctional post-secondary opportunities are not as common within corrections. When higher education degrees are available in correctional facilities, they typically take the form of vocational certifications or academic degrees. Vocational certificates are far more likely to be supported through public

funding than Associate degree or Bachelor's degree programs (TheBestSchools, 2019). With restricted educational opportunities during years of incarceration, these individuals and their case managers are at a disadvantage from the beginning of the reentry process. Even if a correctional client wants to obtain a degree during their release, "more than 3 in 5 colleges and universities use background checks in admissions" (Center for American Progress, 2020). This causes the formerly incarcerated individual to feel hopeless in the higher education application process, and creates more barriers for the reentry case manager to successfully overcome for their clients.

Not only do background checks occur to look for the history of incarceration during the college application process at many institutions, employers often do this as well by creating strict background requirements against those who have criminal records. Even though the formerly incarcerated individual could have substantial education in order to apply for a job, more often than not, employers refrain from hiring formerly incarcerated individuals. For example, an applicant "with a criminal record is 50 percent to 63 percent less likely to get a callback or job offer than an identical applicant without a record-and this effective hiring penalty increases twofold for black applicants compared with white applicants" (Center for American Progress, 2021). The stigma against having a criminal record and the requirement to check for one severely inhibits successful community reentry because the ability to obtain a reliable income is restricted.

Therefore, further legal action needs to target employers who refuse to hire applicants with a history of incarceration. To help prevent the disconnect between the employer and hiring of formerly incarcerated individuals, legislation and financial grants should be further extended to offer tax breaks to companies that hire ex offenders. Additional financial assistance, such as cutting taxes owed by employers, provides an incentive and a reward of financial relief to employers, fixing the stigma against formerly incarcerated individuals and contributing to the

prevention of recidivism through opportunities for stable employment. Ultimately working to prevent recidivism, legally enforcing tax cuts for employers can bridge the gap formerly incarcerated individuals face in qualifying for employment, and Pell Grants that fund higher education degree programs within correctional facilities can help to prevent the disadvantages that occur when an individual reenters society with insufficient education to obtain employment. Solutions that enhance the likelihood of employment among correctional offenders help to minimize the negative stereotypes against formerly incarcerated individuals that inhibit the rehabilitation and reintegration processes.

Prioritize Minimal Resources in order from High to Low-Risk, Target Criminogenic Needs

The work of reentry case managers is inevitably limited by the scarce amount of funding and resources available. With this being said, case managers need to be able to strategically optimize their distribution of the funds and resources that *are* available in order to achieve successful community reentry. The individuals that correctional treatment specialists work with require various amounts of funding and resources because they all have different backgrounds, needs, and levels of risk when it comes to reoffending. To most effectively prevent recidivism, correctional treatment specialists should analyze these differences and allocate the assistance to individuals who are high-risk offenders first, followed by the lower-risk offenders.

This is because high-risk individuals need the resources the most (Burke, Herman, Stroker, Giguere, 2010). Further, “research on high-risk offenders and their criminal behavior reveals that, although they represent a relatively small proportion of the offender population, they are responsible for a disproportionately high amount of crime” (Gossner, Simon, Rector, Ruddell, et al., 2016, para. 1). Given this disproportion, targeting high-risk offenders within funding and resource allocation will have a beneficial impact on society and the prevention of

recidivism. Gossner and colleagues (2016) further suggest that any reoffending reductions within this group will have significant, positive effects on public safety.

Allocating funds and resources towards high-risk before low-risk individuals helps to prevent recidivism because these individuals need a greater extent of assistance and intervention through their reentry into the community. Research has shown that “matching the intensity of interventions to the assessed level of risk (i.e., more intensive strategies for higher risk offenders) results in better offender outcomes” (Carey, 2010, p. 7). This demonstrates that there is a higher chance of preventing recidivism when the level of services provided match the severity of the specific client’s risk of reoffending. Higher-risk offenders are going to require more assistance, which means more financial assistance and community services. Due to funding and resources in this area being so limited, achieving this match is crucial for the clients who are at the biggest risk of harming the community. If case managers are providing a high amount of assistance to low-risk individuals who may not necessarily need it to this extent, the higher-risk individuals are left without proper resources to address their level of need or prevent them from reoffending.

The *TPC Case Management Handbook* also supports the prioritization of high-risk offenders within its explanation of the Integrated Case Management (ICM) strategy. ICM was created to implement improvements in correctional supervision and case management. The ICM approach is a “guide for applying an agency’s time and resources in a way that will enhance community safety through the prevention of future victimization” (Burke et al., 2010, p. 6). The ICM approach is, not only a strong solution to recidivism, but, in doing so, it also outlines strategies to best manage working with minimal funding and resources. While the ICM plan does not provide additional funds to jurisdictions or correctional facilities/programs, it provides guidance on how to properly reallocate current and future resources to achieve effective

community reentry. This approach is realistic and attainable because it acknowledges the challenge of having minimal funds and resources. It ranks offenders based on their level of risk and need, with the levels being extremely high-risk, medium to high-risk, low-risk, and low-risk/administrative offenders. The ICM approach provides strategies for each type of offender that case managers should use to achieve successful community reentry amongst clients.

Further, to combat this issue, ICM demands that case managers should restrict “the use of supervision and treatment resources for low-risk offenders” and target “more resources toward high-risk offenders on the basis of their criminogenic needs” (Burke et al., 2010, p. 12).

Examples of criminogenic factors that formerly incarcerated individuals typically possess are antisocial values/beliefs, antisocial peers, antisocial personality, family dysfunction, low self-control, substance abuse, or lack of respect for authority (Prison Fellowship, 2021). The analysis and inclusion of criminogenic factors should not be overlooked amongst case management because they can have a significant impact on how individuals function in society. Even further, criminogenic factors have shown to be highly associated with and predictive of future criminal behavior (Carey, 2010). If case management fails to address criminogenic needs, especially in high-risk offenders, recidivism is more likely to occur.

Research suggests that “offender outcomes are improved when intervention strategies address criminogenic (rather than non-criminogenic) factors” (Carey, 2010, p. 7-8).

Non-criminogenic factors, or stability factors, include aspects such as housing, employment, transportation, or education. While stability factors are shown to impact successful reentry, and effective case management is dependent on addressing these aspects, preventing recidivism cannot occur by *only* assisting these needs. Moreover, effective rehabilitation into society cannot occur if criminogenic factors of an individual are ignored, as they play a large role in successful

community reentry. For example, getting a job is essential for a formerly incarcerated person to become a productive, contributing member of society and be able to sustain a healthy life, as discussed in the previous section of the paper. But, an individual's antisocial values, network, and personality can heavily inhibit a formerly incarcerated individual in getting, or maintaining employment (Prison Fellowship, 2021).

To ensure optimal likelihood of preventing recidivism and to properly manage having limited resources available, correctional treatment specialists need to prioritize assisting high-risk individuals and fully address their criminogenic needs. Being in control of allocating funds and connecting clients to resources is a lot of responsibility in itself, but even more so when there is minimal to take from in the first place. Correctional treatment specialists need to be able to analyze an offender's level of risk and need to then decide the most appropriate distribution of assistance. In order to effectively achieve the most prevention of recidivism, case managers should restrict funds/resources for low-risk offenders to enhance them for high-risk offenders when it is appropriate and necessary.

Administration-Lead Stress Management / Employee Support Programs

In order to address the challenge of career burnout within correctional treatment specialists, employers need to take accountability and responsibility in not only acknowledging their employees' stress, but also providing proper assistance within the organization in doing so. Micieli's research (2008) further supports the idea that stress in this work environment should no longer be considered a result of individual weakness, but rather due to the organization's complexities and the correctional occupation. Further, most correctional agencies have very few stress related programs or training and, oftentimes, correctional organizations employ outside companies to provide Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) that allow "the lone correctional

employee to seek psychological services to deal with stress on and off the job” (Micieli, 2008, p. 35). Having few program options to seek external assistance creates a level of disconnect between the employer and employee by requiring correctional reentry staff to handle work-related problems on their own through a foreign company.

Instead, stress needs to be treated as an agency and occupational hazard, rather than an individual psychological breakdown of a weak officer (Micieli, 2008). This can be done through stress management and coping training/programs within the employer directly, rather than sending them to third party psychological services. Correctional organizations taking this approach allows them to provide better training, preparation, and resources for correctional workers both inside and outside the prison's environment (Micieli, 2008). Enhancing these aspects for employees, regardless of whether they work directly in a prison facility or not, will help reduce stress and pressure faced within this career.

In turn, administration lead employee support programs create better job performance. This then helps solve two of the main issues discussed previously, recidivism and aspects of career burnout. Further, recidivism is prevented because case managers are able to do their jobs more effectively and efficiently when they have stress-management support from their employers. Not only are case manager duties able to be successfully completed more as stress is reduced through employee-lead programs, but this also means that less stress carries over into home life. Work-family balance was discussed in prior sections as a significant challenge that increases burnout, so holding employers accountable for positively contributing to this balance is crucial and necessary for improvement.

In support of this recommendation, Delprino (2002) conducted a nationwide study on correctional officers and their families to analyze how stress-support services were implemented.

The research consisted of surveying adult and juvenile correctional workers from 76 correctional agencies across the country. Deprino (2002) suggests that while stress is inherent within correctional occupation, correctional organizations can certainly offer employee support programs to prevent the stress from becoming overbearing and causing burnout. Further, “such programs can assist officers and their family members to minimize the potential negative impact that work related stress may have on them” (Micieli, 2008, p. 21). Correctional treatment specialists cannot achieve positive job performance if they are left to undergo and manage the negative effects of this occupation by themselves. Employees often do their best work when they feel valued, safe, supported, and understood by their supervisors and with their coworkers. Effective management over correctional treatment specialists requires the acknowledgment and support of their hard work through the reality of this career.

Employing external companies to provide EAPs does not sufficiently or effectively address, nor solve, the most challenging aspects of a career as a correctional treatment specialist. This is why administration-lead stress management and employee support programs are necessary to have instead. In order to actually decrease job burnout and increase job performance, the overwhelming barriers that already occur due to this career need to be acknowledged and actively addressed by employers. Assisting with both of these issues only enhances the likelihood that recidivism will be prevented throughout each formerly incarcerated individual's community reentry process. Overall, correctional treatment specialists need more support from their agency and its administrative supervisors in order have the best career experience and performance possible.

Applying Knowledge of Career Field

Impact on Future Career

Analyzing the career of a correctional treatment specialist/community reentry case manager has revealed aspects to look for in future employment within the field of correctional rehabilitation. For example, learning about what causes career burnout has given me the knowledge and confidence to look for positions within organizations that acknowledge this within their employees. It has motivated me to seek employment at an organization whose administration cares about the wellbeing of their employees and adapts to the hard reality of being a correctional case manager. In becoming an employee within this career field, it is important to understand that having a positive relationship with the employer/administrative staff can have a beneficial impact on job performance and job satisfaction.

Evaluating the current state of this career and the community reentry process has also enhanced knowledge on the skills and qualities one must possess and maintain to be successful. As a potential employee within this career field, it is immensely helpful to know that one's emotional and mental wellness must be at its best prior to employment. This helps to prepare for career burnout that naturally comes along with this career. Correctional treatment specialists need to ensure that they are emotionally stable enough to help others to the best of their ability. This can be enhanced by consistently practicing self-care, healthy habits, mindfulness, and management of emotions. Learning how big of an impact reentry case managers can have on a client's life, the community, and the criminal justice system demonstrates how important it is that the case manager is able to bring their greatest self to work every day.

In similar ways, knowledge of this career field also teaches and emphasizes the importance of work-life balance, as career burnout has been shown to negatively impact

satisfaction in one's home and personal life. Being aware of this reality is extremely helpful because it allows an individual to enter this career field with values that prioritize the separation of work from home life. While it may be difficult to achieve at times, ensuring a healthy work-life balance begins with understanding the detrimental negative effects that can occur without one. Lastly, another skill that can be personally practiced and attained before entering this career field is a high level of organization and time management. Practicing these skills and knowing their importance before entering the workforce prepares an individual to handle a heavy caseload or multitasking that occurs at work. Organization and time management can be practiced on a daily basis in various ways; being confident in the ability to organize a large caseload and appropriately manage time prevents the likelihood of career burnout. Having the background knowledge of these skills and qualities that can be improved and maintained within yourself creates a better employee in the future.

While having minimal funds and resources available in this career field can be frustrating, understanding and being aware of this challenge allows for an employee to enter this career with the ability to prioritize resources. Furthermore, preventing recidivism is more likely when correctional clients are prioritized by their level of risk, high to low, and their criminogenic needs are targeted through assistance just as stability needs are. Knowledge of there being a lack in available resources creates a more level-headed, realistic employee who is able to effectively allocate assistance. Understanding the reality of having minimal funds and resources to work with ensures that individuals who enter this career prevent themselves from relying on resources that aren't available or ineffectively distributing assistance to the wrong clients or target areas.

Conclusion

Identifying the necessary skills to succeed as a correctional treatment specialist, tackling the challenges of this career, and providing recommended solutions to address these issues is important to not only improving the criminal justice system, but ensuring community safety. Serving as the primary connection between the correctional system and social service agencies, a correctional treatment specialist needs to have interpersonal skills, along with positive regard for the potential to rehabilitate. This career is responsible for repairing the separation faced from society through time spent in the criminal justice system and for ensuring that their clients are at a strong enough point of reentry to be healthy, safe members of a community. Individuals and families heavily rely on correctional treatment specialists to ensure that lives are improved for the better and reentrance into the criminal justice system is avoided. Because there are already minimal funds and resources available to work with as a case manager, a person working in this career needs to have effective decision making and critical thinking skills to make the most effective impact. This requires the ability to make sufficient decisions on which clients, discharge aspects, and social service agencies are the best to allocate funds and resources towards in order to ensure successful community reentry, and ultimately reduce the risk of recidivism.

Overall, individuals leaving incarceration face an immense and diverse number of challenges that inhibit their ability to maintain, or even achieve, successful community reentry as functional members of society. Given that recidivism is the main target of prevention for correctional treatment specialists, support for higher education degree programs and tax breaks for hiring formerly incarcerated individuals are two recommendations that can help a case manager ensure their client finds employment. As employment is just one of many major aspects

of community reentry and preventing recidivism, awareness and prioritization of the various stability *and* criminogenic factors that create barriers for individuals leaving incarceration is crucial. Knowledge of the successes, challenges, and potential solutions within this career field can help ensure that correctional case managers are able to provide sufficient levels of assistance that effectively target the various criminogenic and non-criminogenic needs within each individual client's specific discharge plan.

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